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HOME PREPARATION OF THE FOREIGN MISSIONARY.

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By *home preparation* for the foreign field I do not mean the usual college and seminary training that every male missionary, unless an M.D., is supposed to receive before coming out. In case of the wider or the more limited preparatory training, the question is of great importance how far any *special* preparation for the foreign field can with advantage be provided at home. As special missionary training schools have existed now for many years, especially in Europe, it ought not to be impossible to institute a careful comparison from a large number of cases under various circumstances, and to tabulate the results of such a comparison. An investigation of this kind might give us the answers to our question far more accurately than I can hope to suggest them as deduced from general principles and personal observation. Nevertheless I will venture.

1. *Physical training*.—There can be no question that a strong physique will be greatly in demand, no matter to what part of the world-wide mission field a man may go. At the same time it must be remembered that physical training for the sake of being able to do a vast amount of physical labor and to endure great physical hardships may not count for very much in the older, more settled fields of countries such as Japan, China, or India. In fact, it might be in some respects a disadvantage, inasmuch as the comparatively slight demand upon physical exertion might be to the trained athlete the cause of discomfort and even of disease. It would seem that our ordinary mission fields demand in point of preparation just ordinary physical training such as is provided in connection with almost every one of our American colleges and seminaries. Let the missionary

candidate make faithful, *conscientious* use of the ordinary gymnasium hour, take a moderate hand in baseball and tennis, and do some regular walking each day, and with these his physical constitution, if intrinsically sound, will be well prepared for the average mission field.

2. *Mental training*.—Professor Gilmore, in a recent article upon this subject,¹ says: "Missionaries should be the pick of men." Well, there might be some differences of opinion as to what really constitutes "the pick of men," when taken in its widest sense. The sometimes spoken-of policy that "anything is good enough for the mission field" is, of course, absurd. No man is really good enough for any work of the Master, be it at home or abroad, and we all should "covet earnestly the best gifts." But let not that man who has an earnest, God-given longing to preach the gospel in "the regions beyond," and is fairly gifted and equipped as a minister of the word, be turned from his purpose by the fact, well known to himself, that he is not "the pick" of his class. The converse, however, is equally true, that no man is to consider his superior talents wasted if he should go to the foreign field. We need the best God has for us, and so does the church at home. True, special positions in the foreign field need special qualifications of superior excellence, but this, again, is just as true for the home field. As at home there certainly is room in the ministry for the carefully trained man of average ability, so it is on the foreign mission field. Intellectual qualification counts for much, but it is by no means everything, and we ought not for a moment stake the mission cause upon it.

Wherein the foreign missionary is to be *specially gifted* I will state later on.

3. *Religious training*.—There are tremendous *im-moral* and *ir-religious* forces in heathenism with which the missionary constantly comes in contact. From his heathen surroundings he will receive next to nothing that is morally or religiously stimulating and helpful. He must, on the other hand, constantly give of his own to others. His associates and helpers that are daily about him are, as a rule, very few; not seldom he stands all alone, with

¹ *American Journal of Theology*, July, 1898, pp. 561-73.

no other earthly sympathizer than his helpmeet at home. The atmosphere in which he continually moves is for the most part one of apathetic indifference, if not positively inimical. When he preaches it is not infrequently to a multitude that, for the greater part, knows not whereof he speaks, and is decidedly out of sympathy with him to begin with. If he addresses an audience of converted people, he yet can seldom go to unfold "the deep things of God," but must generally feed them "with milk." As to daily intercourse with native Christians in their home-life—their joys and pleasures, their sorrows and bereavements, their plans and aspirations—there are differences doubtless with different fields, but I think I am safe in saying that the foreign missionary is largely excluded from this personal ministry. The reasons for this cannot be discussed here; the fact is one of common missionary experience. To face successfully these conditions of the foreign field, the missionary needs to be a man of sterling moral and religious caliber, constantly aggressive in his Christian life; otherwise he will certainly stagnate and finally succumb spiritually. Among his home preparations should be that of gaining firm moral and religious convictions on the essential truths of Christianity, that of independent thinking, but above all, that of implicit and immovable faith in the rich promises of God. Hence a large acquaintance with these "promises of God" might well form a part of every missionary's outfit from home. If in his first voyage out he is not too seasick, he might usefully employ a good part of his time on board of ship in hunting up and collating these "promises," to see in them reflected the wonderful love of God, "wider than the widest ocean; deeper than the deepest sea; higher than the highest heaven; vaster than eternity."

But, again, the foreign missionary is not only a preacher of the gospel; he is frequently also a leader of men and a trainer of future workers. As a first requisite for successful leadership and real training power I would place this same thorough moral and spiritual equipment. Overtowering stature and a vigorous muscular body the multitude may admire; high intellectual endowments the educated few may appreciate; while true moral

worth and a deep-running spiritual life may be hid from the people for a while, but, given time and opportunity, these will surely become apparent, and by and by command that profound respect and exert that true drawing power by which souls will be irresistibly attracted, as steel filings are attracted by the magnet.

4. *Special training.*—Should the missionary have any *special* training before he comes out to the field; and, if so, of what kind? It may be well to ask, first, whether he should have any special *qualifications*, for these do not necessarily presuppose special training. And here we may first of all refer to the matter of *linguistic ability*, one of the most important factors in the missionary's equipment. That no man should be sent out who is known to have no aptitude for mastering a language other than his mother-tongue amounts almost to an axiom, admitting only of rare exceptions in cases of certain special work. The longer one is on the foreign field, the more thoroughly he becomes convinced of the prime importance of this faculty to get hold of the language of the people. The great and awfully sad mistake thus far made with regard to Japan in supposing that work in mission schools can be carried on successfully by men and women not conversant with the Japanese language is happily beginning to be recognized, at least here and there, but only after it has worked untold mischief that can never be righted.

But the question before us at present is how best to secure this essential part of the equipment, and how to ascertain beforehand the fact whether or not a candidate for the foreign field has this special gift. The former point turns more or less upon the question whether aptitude for languages is a *faculty* or an *endowment*. Is it inborn, or is it acquired? I believe that it is both, just like almost everything else in the intellectual line. To say that some persons are naturally gifted this way, while others are not, is again putting it on a par with all other intellectual endowments.

Now, as to the manner of acquiring skill in languages, it would seem that the ordinary grammar school and college, with

their classical course in Latin and Greek, and their modern course in French and German, besides the seminary with its course in Hebrew and other Semitic languages, afford abundant opportunity for the student's training to such an extent that upon graduation from the seminary he ought to be amply qualified to take up and grapple with any language of ordinary difficulty on the mission field. It will be a splendid preparation for him. Beyond this it is not worth his while, I think, to spend some time, say six months or a year, in studying at home the language of the special mission field to which he expects to go. Unless this could be done altogether incidentally along with other necessary preparation, I should consider the time thus spent little better than wasted. It might do irreparable harm by giving him a wrong start. He can make more *real* progress in the language in six weeks on the field than in six months at home. Questions like the following in regard to this point seem to me pertinent: Can a man *plod* in getting out his language lesson? Does he *see into* the thing? Can he *handle* a passage? Is he *quick of ear* to catch the sounds of a foreign language? And when it comes to the study of a modern language where a speaking acquaintance is aimed at, the additional and very important question is: Can the student readily express himself in what he has learned of the language? This last, after all, is the crucial test of the matter on the mission field with every one of us. It must be remembered that even a lexicographer may be but a very indifferent speaker in the language which he has so accurately defined in terms of his own language. And this may not at all be owing to his lack of gift in general as a speaker. To this point more attention might well be paid in our colleges at home, and especially by those students who desire to know for themselves their chances of being able to utter their thoughts in a foreign language on the mission field. The late Rev. Guido F. Verbeck, justly called "the prince of missionaries in Japan," was decidedly a case in point. The careful training he received in modern languages at one of the Moravian schools of Holland, where each language studied had its day on which, from morning till evening, no other language than that of the day might

be spoken by the pupil either in school or at play, provided him with a master-key for both studying and using the language of Japan with a freedom, accuracy, and scope such as astonished his Japanese audiences, and have not been equaled by either missionary or civilian in this country. Let the student, while preparing himself for the mission field, exercise as much as possible this faculty of *thinking in* and *using* the language he is studying, no matter what that language may be. This is just what he will need to do with the language of his prospective field of labor. And if he has gone through the drill of getting one language other than his mother-tongue in this way, it will be of immense help to him in getting still another, even though the latter may be as different from the one he has previously acquired as these oriental languages actually are from our Teutonic tongues.

In conclusion I will mention one more point of special preparation for missionary labor. It is of a negative character—the abandoning of set notions beforehand as to how a man is going to work when he gets to the foreign field. By paying heed to this, a person may spare himself the severe pain of disappointment and, perchance, save his own reputation. The mission field is much like a sea without trade winds; one has to “shift” and “tack” and “furl sail” and “haul in” and make many such like maneuvers; so much so that any “fixed policy” or “straight course” is frequently quite out of the question. This does not mean that one has no fixed policy, or does not care for any straight course, but it simply means that, like the master of a ship under sail, he does the best he can under the circumstances, like Paul, the great apostolic missionary, who became servant unto all, that he might gain the more.

But after all that can be said about special preparation at home, it is really the actual doing of the work that reveals the difficulties of the situation, as well as suggests the best means to success. One thing is certain, namely, that the home boards ought to allow to their respective missions a pretty free hand in regard to methods and details of work. And this is, I believe, the policy of most mission boards, especially of those which have

had the most experience in the work. The boards, however, cannot be too vigilant about the matter of choosing their material of men and women. A mistaken charitableness of judgment on this point is too expensive a luxury to the home churches, and is doing a great injustice to the individual candidates concerned.